

LETTER

To the Reverend

SAMUEL BENCOCK

Occasion'd by his late

ESSAY

ON

LIBERTY, GRACE and PARDON

JOHN NORMAN.

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of contingent events
indicated

W I N A

LETTER

To the Reverend

THE SAMUEL RANCOURT

of the late

ESSAY

ON

THE GRACE AND FORTITUDE



BY JOHN NORMAN

LONDON

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Reverend Sir,

I was very obliging in you to make me a present of your Essay on LIBERTY, GRACE, and PRESCIENCE, so soon after its publication. And I beg leave, in this way, to acknowledge the favour, and at the same time, to give you my sentiments about the *last* of these arguments, in the discussion of which you have taken more than ordinary pains, and advanced a notion which seems to be very much your favourite. That I confine myself to the *last*, is not owing, I assure you, to an apprehension of your having consider'd the *other two* in a manner so very clear and unexceptionable, as to leave no room for the animadversions of an opponent; but, partly to a want of time for controversial pursuits (and especially when there is no prospect of getting over the difficulties attending them) and partly to some concern which I think I have, though very unexpectedly, in *that one*.

When I wrote to you formerly, in compliance with your request, about the fore-

knowledge of God, I set down such things as occurred upon a cursory view of the subject, without giving myself the trouble of so close an inquiry into it, as would have been necessary, had I pretended to any degree of accuracy. And as I was not solicitous about exactness in the arrangement of the thoughts contain'd in that Letter, nor in the manner of expressing them (which I believed a friend and a brother would easily excuse) so I did not think a copy of it worth preserving. You may therefore suppose that I was a little surpriz'd to find your reply, or a good part of it, made publick, and that they were my objections, and (as well as I could remember) in my own words, that you had answer'd, though my name was not mentioned. I confess such a notice of me was an honour which I did not look for; and I am obliged to you for thinking that I could suggest any thing not altogether unworthy of your cognizance; but as things stood, it would, I apprehend, have been more friendly if you had left every thing of mine out of the debate; and could I have known your intention in season, I should have desir'd it. However, as what you have done gives me no great uneasiness, so it will, I presume, occasion none to you, that I am one of the many thousands who think you very much mistaken.

That

That your *design* is good, I can make no doubt of. And since it is apparent, that a zeal for the honour of God's *moral perfections*, and a persuasion that the best of Beings cannot be cleared from having a culpable concern in the sinful conduct of his creatures, but upon your principles, led you into your scheme of thoughts, so far would I be from giving countenance to those very severe censures to which your publishing it has expos'd you, that as often as I may hear you ungenerously and uncharitably reflected upon, I shall think it my duty to be your advocate. But after all, I see no reason to be of your opinion.

I can perceive by many passages in your ESSAY that, according to your way of judging, *prescience* amounts to a *decree*. Nor do you stick at asserting, that an "eternal fore-knowledge of sin as what *will be*, has all the absurdities of an *eternal decree* of sin, and stains the *moral perfections* of God as much *." This is what you seem to be confident of; and so the very same horrid consequences which you charge upon the *decree*, you charge upon the other; and this you have done in such a manner as cannot but be very shocking to a serious reader†; the expediency of which is left to your second thoughts, and well deserves them. Excellent Bishop Burnet observes, that it is "a very indecent way of managing these

* Essay, p. 71.

† Ibid. p. 66, 67, &c.

" points, that both sides do too often speak
 " very *boldly* of God ——— from which
 " though they think to escape by saying,
 " that they are only shewing what must fol-
 " low if the other opinion were believed;
 " yet there is a *solemnity* and *gravity* of stile,
 " that ought to be most religiously observed,
 " when we poor mortals take upon us to
 " speak of the glory or attributes, the de-
 " crees or operations of the great God of
 " heaven and earth *. Whether you have
 given any just occasion for my pointing out
 that passage, is submitted to the world, and
 to yourself; as also, whether your treatment
 of the persons against whom you write be
 candid and equitable.

Your acquaintance with polemical authors
 must, I am satisfy'd, have led you to take no-
 tice that even those of them, who have gone
 so far as to maintain that God has decreed,
 or fore-ordained whatsoever shall come to pass,
 have maintain'd too, that the freedom of
 the creature is by no means destroy'd by
 such a pre-ordination †; nor have any writers

* Exposition of the 39 Artic. p. 166.

† Quod statuit determinationem ad unum per necessitatem
 physicam, vel coactionis, tollit libertatem & contingentiam;
 sed non quod eum statuit tantum per necessitatem *hypotheticam*;
 quia coactio non oritur ex causarum secundarum natura, quæ
 libere sunt & contingentes, sed extrinsecè ex decreti immuta-
 bilitate, quod ita determinat futuritionem eventus, ut rerum
 naturam non mutat, sed res necessarias necessario, liberas libere
 agere sinat. ———

Quamvis ergo in ordine ad causam pri-
 mam dicantur omnia necessaria, tamen secundum se sumpta,
 quædam possunt esse libera. Turret. Theolog. vol. 1. p. 352.

more

more expressly guarded against making the blessed God to be the *author of sin*, than those divines who have admitted that notion into their systems *. And I think you should have been less forward to charge *consequences* upon their *Theology*, which they have always detested. What though such consequences might appear to you to follow necessarily from their tenets? As you know they ever deny this, and have discovered as sincere a concern for God's *moral perfections* as you yourself can do, the least that could have been expected was, that you should have told the world so. But instead of that you say, "let them tell all that are about them, that the characters of God's moral perfections are most deeply imprinted upon his works and word, that heaven and earth, that every creature and every page in our Bibles do fully witness to their truth. — And that though our imperfect and obscurer way of thinking and talking of God's absolute perfections of being, may seem to gainsay all this, yet they mean it not, they abhor the thought, it cannot be truth †. This looks to me like an insinu-

* Quamvis res omnes necessarie dicuntur ex decreto; Deus non propterea potest confiteri author peccati, quia decretum quod est causa futuritionis peccati, non est tamen ejus causa, nec physica per malitiam infusionem, nec ethica per ejus approbationem; ita licet ad decretum sequatur peccatum necessario, non tamen potest dici fluere ex decreto; quia decretum non influit in rem, nec est effectivum mali, sed tantum permissivum & directivum. Turres. Theolog. vol. I. p. 353.

† Essay, p. 65.

ation

ation of their being faulty in not declaring as you would have them; whereas they have done it upon all occasions; so that your way of representing them is not, I think, quite so friendly as it should have been, nor can they believe it to be so. And I very much wish that you had abated some degree of your warmth with regard to them and their principles, which you might have done without leaving out of your Essay any of its real embellishments.

But where is the necessity, Sir, of asserting an *eternal decree* of sin, though an *eternal fore-knowledge* be contended for? For my part, I can't see this to be so very clear as you would make the world believe it is. And yet you treat the two notions as if you could demonstrate their identity; and those who think they can conceive a *prescience* without a *decree*, in the case of *moral evil*, and will by no means admit that they must *stand and fall together*; and that to divide them, is to destroy them both, or to introduce the doctrine of fate (which you say the generality of your brethren, that have fallen within the compass of your acquaintance, are establish'd in) have not escap'd the lash of your pen, which has charg'd them with talking *nonsense* and *wickedly* for God, or rather *against* him *; a way of expressing yourself, which for your own sake, as well

* Essay, p. 8, 90.

as from a regard to their characters, I was sorry to meet with.

Suffer me now, Sir, to look a little into the grounds of the confidence you discover that you are in the right about this argument. "As sure (say you) as God is all that is good, upright, and equal, so sure we may be, that the existence of sin was no object of his fixed and determined, of his absolute and eternal fore-knowledge*." So that according to you, the notion for which you plead is a most certain and undeniable truth, and as evident as a *first principle*. But how is the certainty of it to be made appear? If in the same way by which we learn that God is *all that is good, upright, and equal*, then it must have *revelation* and *reason* both to confirm it as that has, whereas it does not appear to me to be the language of either.

Where does *Revelation* tell us, I would beg leave to ask you, that *sin could not be the object of God's eternal fore-knowledge*? You say, and with a great deal of truth, that "the wisdom, holiness, justice, &c. of God are so fully, clearly, and frequently asserted in holy Writ, and in such strong and emphatical terms, that all the wit of man can never evade their force, †" Now you are obliged to point out to us the *very same degree* of evidence which these words of yours de-

* Essay, p. 79.

† Ibid. p. 63.

scribe, to make it appear that sin was no object of God's eternal fore-knowledge, or own that you were too rash and hasty in saying we are *as sure of that*, as we are that *God is all that is good, upright, and equal*; since nothing but the *same degree* of evidence can produce the *same certainty*. But in what part of the sacred writings is this *evidence* to be met with? Were it to be found there, is it not surprizing that so few among the most serious, diligent, and impartial enquirers into the divine oracles, should be able to discover it, and that a truth which, if you are right, must stand in the fullest and most obvious light, and such a truth too as must be maintained, if we would be able to maintain the honour of God's moral perfections, should escape their re-searches, and that they should so generally declare in favour of the opposite sentiment? Our blessed Saviour has promised, that *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God*, Luke vii. 17. Which promise, though it does not secure good men from *all mistakes* in matters of religion, nor countenance any pretensions to *infallibility*, must, if you will allow it to be of any signification, amount, at least, to this, *viz.* that where there is probity of mind, and a sincere endeavour to know the truth, persons shall be preserved from fatal errors. And if the received notion of *prescience* makes, as you insinuate,

Insinuate, the best of Beings the author of *all the impurities, that either have been or will be in the world* *; if it be destructive of God's endearing attributes, such as his *purity and love*, and leaves upon him *the infinite odium of being the first and principal cause of the creature's sin*, as you fear it does †; I cannot think that Providence would have suffered it to be universally maintain'd by the *ancients*, and by the best and most eminent men in the several ages of the church since. But let that be as it will, I cannot see that you yourself have been so kind as to direct your readers to any chapter and verse in the Bible, in which it is asserted, or from which it can with absolute certainty be concluded, that sin was no object of God's eternal foreknowledge, which you were highly obliged to do, when you resolved to say that we are *as sure of it as we are that God is all that is good, upright, and equal*. And I beg that you would not be offended at my telling you, that what you advance is, in my opinion, so far from *stabbing Atheism to the heart*, as you fancy **, that it rather gives it countenance. For when men are told, that there is no greater evidence of God's *moral perfections* themselves, than of a point which so few agree in; will not this tempt them to think that the very existence of a Deity is, at best, but an uncertainty.

* Essay, p. 58.

† P. 76.

** P. 75.

Well, Sir, the *positive evidence*, which you require for the truth or reality of our notion, and on which you say it must depend *, we are hitherto at a loss for, to support and confirm yours. In the mean time we think that *Revelation* is plainly on that side of the question which we maintain. There we read that God is *perfect in knowledge*, Job xxxvi. 4. That *his understanding is infinite*, Psal. cxlvii. 5. That *all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*, Heb. iv. 13. That *times are not hidden from the Almighty*, Job xxiv. 1. And that *He maketh known what shall be in the latter days*, Dan. ii. 28. And we find that the prophet *Isaiah* speaks of God as pleading his cause against the idolatrous *Gentiles*, and challenging them to make out the divinity of their *Idols*, by their foretelling things to come. *Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons — let them shew us what shall happen — the things that are to come hereafter : that we may know that ye are Gods*, chap. xli. 21, 22, 23. Such texts as these, and many more, in which the *Omniscience* of God is asserted, together with a number of express *prophecies* (the fulfilling of which depended upon the behaviour of men *acting freely*) of whose punctual accomplishment we have

* Essay, p. 79.

undoubted

undoubted assurance, oblige us to believe such
prescience as we defend, and you oppose.
 and I cannot but think, that had you allow-
 ed these proofs of the perfection, and bound-
 less extent of the divine knowledge, their just
 strength, they would have had a weight with
 you *equal*, at least, to any that you could offer on
 that side of the question which you espouse;
 and then you must have left it (as you say in
 that case we ought to do) * amongst the
arcana imperii, the secret things which be-
 long to God, and would have been excused
 from the trouble of publishing your papers,
 the loss of which, I fancy, the world would
 not have overmuch lamented.

You have attempted, I confess, a reply to
 some passages of scripture offered against your
 opinion; and the explications of them, by
 which you endeavour to evade difficulties,
 may look plausible, and be countenanced by
 a few commentators. But it is well known,
 that many of the criticks are against you. By
 the *Psalmist's* saying (for instance) *Thou un-
 derstandest my thought afar off.* Psal. cxxxix.
 2. Mr. Pool, (whose character I need not
 mention) tells us he meant, "Thou knowest
 " what my thoughts will be, in such and such
 " circumstances, long before I know it, yea,
 " *from eternity.*" The very learned Dr. Pa-
 trick has given us this paraphrase of the words,

* Essay p. 70.

viz. " My inclinations are so perfectly understood by thee, that before I have conceived any design, it is visible unto thee." And that the royal prophet speaks here of God's *prescience*, is an interpretation which has many other considerable authorities to support it *. So that if you had opposed their sentiments with more diffidence of your own, your modesty would not have been greater than is thought very becoming in all such cases †. It is plain, I think, that *David* had the *omniscience* of God in view, when he composed the psalm in which the text before cited is found, as well as his *immensity*. So that though the phrase may, as you observe, relate to *place*, and carry this in it, that notwithstanding God is said to dwell in heaven, he is not so absent from this world, as to be unacquainted with the most secret transactions here; yet the words may have relation to *time* as well as *place*, though you will by no means allow of it. You fancy, that because the *thought* which God is here said to understand afar off, *David* calls *his own* thought ‡, therefore the text does not properly concern the argument between us; but I cannot, for

* Vid. *Pool. Synop.* in loc.

† ——— Modestiae est ita in eorum expositione versari, ut nihil temere definias, nihil superciliosè praescribas, sed potius quid tibi, omnibus expensis probabilissimum & verisimilimum videatur, verècundè profitearis. — *Witsius* Orat. de Theologo modesto apud Joh. Alph. Turretin. Nub. Test. p. 44.

‡ Essay p. 113.

my part, see any great matter in this. It is true, God cannot understand a thought to be mine before it is mine; but he may, long before, such and such thoughts enter into my mind, and even before all worlds, know that they *will be* mine; and as it is *certain* to him that they *will be so*, he may call them *mine*. But I shall make this letter much longer than I design it, if I pretend to enter into all the things which are in debate between us. And therefore, I proceed to consider some very plain and certain proofs found in scripture of God's *prescience*. And if it can be made appear, that there are instances of it, and even in the case of *contingencies*, which is the point in dispute, this surely must decide the controversy. Now, the instances which I fix upon, are God's *foreknowledge* (and that before all worlds) of *Adam's fall*; and the *prophecies*.

That the *fall* of *Adam* was *foreknown*, you can make no difficulty of granting, if we can shew, that a *Saviour* was from eternity appointed to recover him and his posterity from that *fall*, and the fatal consequences thereof. And of this the scripture, I think, furnishes us with sufficient evidence. That expression of the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, Rev. xiii. 8. seems to have more in it than you will admit of. You say, it may be understood of the first promise, that the *seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head*, which was made immediately after our *fall*;
nor

nor will you grant that it implies an *eternal purpose* that Christ should be a sacrifice for sin*. But when other texts, which I shall have occasion to mention presently, are considered, I hope you will see reason to alter your sentiments. In the mean time, I cannot but take notice with concern, that as you have revived the *Socinian* way of reasoning against the *foreknowledge* of God (though I am satisfied you are as far as any person living from being in their scheme in other respects) so you go into their manner of interpreting scripture in defence of it; the account which you give of the words before cited, being too much like their gloss upon *John i. 1. In the beginning was the Word*, which they would have to signify, *In the beginning of the gospel*. But should we suppose for once, that what is said of the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, is to be understood as respecting the *first promise* of the Messiah; yet if we can shew that Christ was appointed to be a Mediator *before* that time, it may be expected, that you will own this to be of consequence in the present argument. Let us then hear the apostle St. Paul, with reference to this, *Ephes. i. 4. According as he hath chosen us in him, (i. e. in Christ) πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, before the foundation of the world*. This is a text which I take to be very full to the put-

ose. As is that of St. Peter, 1 Epist. i. 20.
 ὅς ἐστιν ὁ ἄμνος, by whose precious blood
 he had said in the verse preceding we were
 redeemed) *verily was foreordained, ἀπὸ κατα-
 βολῆς κόσμου, before the foundation of the world.*
 It is plain from these passages, that a Saviour
 was appointed *before the fall*, and indeed *be-
 fore all worlds, or from eternity.* And we
 find that the expression which I insist upon as
 a proof of it, is made use of by our blessed
 Lord himself, when he speaks of his Father's
 eternal love to him, John xvii. 24. — *For thou
 lovedst me, ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, before the
 foundation of the world.*

But, say you *, "as to what you mention
 " about the scheme of our redemption, I take
 " it as consider'd before all worlds, to have
 " been only a *provisional remedy*, in case of
 " *Adam's fall*; which an infinite mind, with-
 " out any time or labour, though with ex-
 " quisite and absolute wisdom, form'd for his
 " recovery.

I am apt to believe, that you found your
 self constrained by the force of the texts be-
 fore-mentioned to own, though with reluc-
 tancy, that a Saviour was provided even *from
 eternity.* However, you have one way, by
 which you think you can clear your hands of
 our argument from thence, which is by ad-
 vancing that he was only *conditionally* provid-

ed; and yet, how you will be able to make that out, I cannot yet see; nor do I think your notion defensible. Divines generally agree, that the great affair of redemption was transacted between the *Father* and the *Son* upon *federal* terms, each person undertaking to perform his part, in order to our recovery. “ Besides the covenant made by God with
 “ man (says learned Bishop *Pearson* *) con-
 “ firmed by the blood of Christ, we must
 “ consider and acknowledge another cove-
 “ nant from eternity, made by the *Father*
 “ with the *Son*.” And there is sufficient foundation for this in scripture. Now is it to be supposed, that so great a design should be formed, and the measures by which it was to be carried on fixed between the *Father*, who insisted upon satisfaction for offences that should be committed against him, and the *Son*, who undertook to make the satisfaction demanded, when neither the *Father* nor the *Son* knew that there would be any occasion for the execution of a design in so solemn a manner concerted? Or, can you think it becoming infinite wisdom to make such an appointment, and to enter into such a stipulation, upon grounds altogether uncertain and precarious? It is true, as you observe, this was done without any time or labour. And would not that have been the case, if it had been

* Exposit, of the Creed, p. 185.

lest till *Adam* had fallen, which would have been time enough to have thought of his recovery, and to have resolved upon the method in which it was to be effected? I confess I should much sooner be brought to think so, than to believe that there was a consultation, before all worlds, about settling a scheme, which, for any thing the divine persons concern'd in it knew to the contrary, (the plain meaning of your notion) might have been entirely useless. It is no scruple with me to make the decree of redemption *absolute* as well as *eternal*. And I hope to shew, before I have done, that this may be maintained, without holding such an *absolute* and *eternal necessity* of *Adam's* fall, as would destroy his liberty, acquit him from guilt, and charge his disobedience upon his Maker.

I proceed now to look a little into the validity of the argument for God's *eternal foreknowledge* of *contingent* events taken from *prophecies* *, which you own to be a difficulty, and I believe, will find an insuperable, though not the only, one in your way. The bounds to which I have confined my self, will not suffer me to enter into the nature of *prophecies* in general, nor to be large in treating of any one prophecy in particular. What I have to say upon this head, will be with an especial view to the predictions relating to our Savi-

* *Præscientia* tantos habet testes, quantos fecit prophetas. *Tertullian*, adversus *Marcion*. lib. 2.

our's sufferings, and the circumstances of them, that we may see whether these do not amount to a proof of the *prescience*, which I appear in the defence of.

That there are such *predictions* found in the old testament, you will not, I hope, deny. Indeed you seem to express your self a little doubtfully about this; but I am willing to think that you do not wholly lay aside an argument, which the advocates for our holy religion have always made use of and in which the cause of Christianity is so much concerned.

The words of *David*, *Psalm* xli. 9. *Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me*, have been generally thought to be dictated by the Holy Ghost, with a view to the ingratitude and perfidioness, of *Judas* in betraying our Saviour. And though they may be literally meant either of *Achitaphel*, or of some other treacherous courtier; yet as they are applied by Christ himself to that false and wicked disciple, and he mentioned them as fulfilled in him, *John* xiii. 18. we have reason to believe they were, and in as proper a sense, as if they had no regard to any other event. And it is observable, that when our Lord had taken notice of the passage above cited, he thought fit to add, *Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come ye may believe that I am he*, i. e. (according to the opinion

ion of a learned man) not only that I am the
Christ, but also that I am he who searcheth
the hearts, and knows things future and con-
tingent *.

The *thirty pieces* of silver for which Christ
was betray'd, are mention'd in a noted pro-
phesy, which stands recorded in the book of
Zech. Chap. xi. 12, as are the indignities of-
fered him when he was buffeted and spit upon,
Isaiah l. 6. he had vinegar given him to drink
mingled with gall, his garments were parted
among the soldiers, and they cast lots upon his
vesture, they pierced his hands and feet, and
these things were pointed out in prophecy,
Psal. xxii. 16, 18, lxix. 21. The liii. chap.
of *Isaiah* is a description of Christ's passion
almost in every particular and circumstance of
it. And some of these expressions are not
applicable, without forced metaphors, to any
person besides our Saviour. So that here are
predictions of events several ages before the
events to which they relate happen'd, and be-
fore the persons concerned in bringing them to
pass had a being.

Now you are pleased to say, " If you can
" prove that the events were *absolutely* fore-
" told, I think I may undertake to prove they
" were not, at the time of such prophecies,
" *most contingent* : or if you can prove they
" were even then, of the number of such
" actions as were *most contingent*, I may un-

* Vid. Dr. *Whitby* in loc.

" undertake

"undertake to shew, they were only conditionally foretold †." An effectual answer, I must own, to our argument, if you can make out what you undertake; but, if I am not very much mistaken, you will find this a greater difficulty than you are aware of.

That the accomplishment of the predictions, before taken notice of, depended upon the conduct of free agents, is evident upon your own principles. In the *second letter* of your *Essay*, where you consider the *moral agency* of the accountable creature in its *lapsed or fallen state*, you assert, "That we cannot choose till we have liberty, and we cannot be under a law, and promises, and threatenings, if we cannot choose. *"
Judas then was under no necessity of betraying *Christ*, nor were the *Jews* compelled to crucify him; but their using him in so barbarous a manner, was voluntary and chosen. And if that had not been the case, how would their wickedness have been so aggravated as the scripture represents it? If we suppose then that these men acted freely, in bringing about the events which had been foretold, the events themselves must belong to the class of contingencies; and if you will be consistent with your self, you must allow this.

And now, Sir, you will be obliged to prove (as you are pleased to say you think

† *Essay*, p. 138. * *Essay*, p. 38.

you may undertake to do) that these events were not *absolutely* foretold. Certain it is that such predictions, as were always understood to relate to the Messiah, were punctually fulfilled in our Jesus. This has been often and undeniably proved; it is what we have always maintained, particularly in our disputes with the *Jews*, and by this we have been endeavouring to convince them that Christ was the great personage spoken of in the writings of their prophets, and of whose coming there was, about the time of our Lord's appearing in the flesh, so general an expectation. Our Saviour's divine Mission ought not, I own, to be represented as depending upon that single argument, his *miracles* being sufficient to convince all that will lay aside their prejudices, that he came from God. But yet as he was so plainly pointed out in the *prophecies* of the Old Testament, and these prophecies were appealed to by himself, it was necessary that the events foretold should exactly correspond with such predictions; since if there had been a failure as to this, it would have been urged, and with considerable strength too, that Christ was not the *Messiah* promised to the *Jews*, and referred to by their prophets; for that the *prophecies* were not fulfilled in him. And if it was necessary, upon that account, that the events should come to pass, it will follow that they were *absolutely* foretold, that is to say,

say, that they were foretold as things which would *assuredly be*. Besides, if it had been possible for things thus predicted not to have proved true, as they could not have been *criteria* of Christ's being the *Messiah*, so he depended upon, so I cannot see that the prophecies concerning him would have been of any signification. To which I add, that the *characters* of the *prophets* must have suffered egregiously, if what they delivered was altogether an uncertainty; and their veracity would have been justly called in question. I conclude therefore that such events as I have been speaking of, though depending upon the conduct of *free agents*, were *absolutely* foretold, and consequently were foreknown to the Divine Mind. Our Lord taught his disciples that the *Son of Man* must *suffer many things*, and *be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and of the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again*, Mark viii. 31. And chap. ix. 12. — *It is written of the Son of Man, that he must suffer many things and be set at nought*. So Luke xviii. 31. *And all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished*. What these things were we are told in the two following verses, *For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully intreated, and spitted on; and they shall scourge him and put him to death; and the*
third

third day he shall rise again. And after our Saviour's resurrection we find him speaking thus to the two disciples going to Emmaus, Luke xxiv. 25, 26. *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?* Now such texts as these plainly shew that our blessed Saviour's sufferings were *absolutely* foretold. What *condition* is there hinted, or how will you make it appear that they imply any? We ought indeed, as you say, to distinguish between a prophecy absolutely *expressed* only, and one that is absolute in its *design* *. But it is your business to shew that the *design* of such prophecies as I have been considering was no more than *conditional*, though they were absolutely *expressed*. And I wish you would be so kind as to name the *condition* of them, and, at the same time, to tell us how your notion of *prophetical threatnings* can be made out, with respect to *moral evils*, and such too as were foretold ages before the persons who committed them were in being, which is evidently the case. When you think fit to do this, your reasoning will deserve to be consider'd; but when you advance so many things without proof, if there is not that notice taken of them which you may expect, though you may think yourself

neglected, there can be no room for complaining. I will only add, for a farther illustration of what I have been arguing, that the revolutions of kingdoms, the destruction of states, cities, and nations, which are foretold plentifully by the prophets, are so many instances of God's *Prescience* of the sins of men. For it was the *luxury, pride, idolatry, cruelty, &c.* of the kingdoms which were destroy'd, that were the procuring causes for which the providence of God gave them up to desolation. And it was the *pride, ambition, bloody cruelty, &c.* of the conquerors that excited them to make these kingdoms desolate, and destroy so many thousand lives. Now if the sins of the *conquer'd*, and the sins of the *conquerors*, cannot be fore-known by God himself, the *prophecies* are not *certain*, and almost all the transactions of mankind are taken away from under the Divine Government; for the *good* actions of men are almost infinitely fewer than the *evil*, if we survey all mankind in all ages and nations. And now I cannot help expressing my fear, that you weaken the argument for Christianity taken from the *prophecies*, and their accomplishment. The *Deists*, I believe, are of that mind, and perhaps, for that reason very much applaud your performance. Far be it from me to intend this as a reflection; nor would I be thought to suspect your veneration for revealed religion (of which I am

I am fully satisfy'd) but I have been inform'd that some Gentlemen, who are no hearty friends to it, are your great admirers, which, I presume, I may say I am sorry for, without being thought to envy you any part of your valuable reputation. But it is high time for me to have done with the argument, as it is to be judged of according to *scripture evidence*.

Let us now see upon what bottom it stands when we carefully look into the *nature* and *reason* of things. And this way you have labour'd very hard to prove, that *sin* could not be the object of God's *eternal fore-knowledge*; but I cannot think that your success has been equal to the pains you have taken.

In what you say about *truth*, *saturition*, *necessity*, &c. you have given the world a specimen of your *metaphysical* talent, and the air with which you deliver your sentiments, makes it plain that you look upon them as fully justified. But, if I am rightly inform'd; a very ingenious Gentleman, and worthy Divine of the *Establishment*, will soon publish his thoughts of what you have advanced upon these heads, and give you an opportunity of explaining your notions more clearly; and likewise of reconciling several passages, in which you have the misfortune of being at variance with yourself. And as his disquisitions will, I am persuaded, be very acceptable, and especially to such as are ac-

D 2

quainted

quainted with *abstract reasoning*, so they will save me a great deal of labour. However, I shall beg leave to offer a few things to your consideration, though I leave the rest to a better hand.

You know, Sir, very well, that we never dare to set any bounds to the *Divine Powers*, but always maintain, that God can do every thing that does not imply a *contradiction*. And as his *knowledge* is *infinite*, as well as his *power*, and all the rest of his perfections, he must have all that knowledge which cannot be made appear to carry in it a *contradiction*. Indeed you are pleased to say, "suppose I could not have fixt a plain *contradiction* upon the received notion of *Divine Prescience*, must I therefore needs admit it immediately as true?" To which I answer, without doubt you must; and for the very same reason that you must admit his *power* to extend to every thing, on his doing which you cannot fix a plain *contradiction*. And as I presume you make no scruple of one, why should you of the other? You say yourself in the very next words to these, which I took notice of before, "I ought indeed to allow it possible for any contradiction that I can see in it." A kind concession! Well, Sir, if you ought to allow such a *Prescience* as we plead for to be *possible*, certainly you ought to admit it to be *true*, unless you will not allow the

Divine

Divine Being to have all *possible* knowledge. But I am sure you will much sooner own an inconsistency in your thoughts and way of writing, than contend for any thing to the diminution of any one of the Divine Perfections.

You may think, however, that you have actually fixt a contradiction upon the general opinion about the fore-knowledge of God, and your aim is to persuade the world to believe so; but as yet, I assure you, it is what I have not been able to discover, though I have read your *ESSAY* very carefully, and with a mind open to conviction.

The fair state of the question between us I take to be this; *viz. Whether God could not resolve or decree before all worlds, to make a free creature, and to leave him free, and yet know how he would, in all circumstances, use that freedom?* Now where is the contradiction in holding this question in the affirmative? I own, with you, that God's knowledge is *certain* and *infallible*, and were it not so, it would not be *knowledge* but *mistake*, or at best, but conjecture. In consequence of this I own too, that what God foreknew before all worlds would be, would come to pass in time as he foreknew it, and that *certainly* and *infallibly*. But then, say you, what he thus foreknew *could not but be*, and how, supposing all this, was the creature *free*? The answer to which, and indeed to the

the whole that you have offered concerning it, may be given, I think, without a multitude of words, which rather perplex than elucidate an argument.

And I ask you, Sir, whether you cannot conceive that an event (let *Adam's sin* be the instance) might be *certain*, as viewed by the Divine Mind, and yet, consider'd as depending upon the will and determination of a creature acting *freely, contingent*? An ingenious writer observes, that "there is a difference between *certain*ty of event, and *necessity* of event; and (says he) if this distinction is plain and undeniable, it unavoidably follows, that God can foresee things whose events are *certain only*, and not *necessary*; that he can foresee things that *certainly will be* (though they are *contingent* and *may not be*) by foreseeing the *causes* which will *certainly* produce them; as he can foresee things that *necessarily must be*, by foreseeing the *causes* that *must* produce them *." And according to this notion it is very obvious that God sees things no otherwise than in truth they are, that is to say, *necessary* things as *necessary*, and *contingent* things as *contingent*, though he knows both with an *equal certainty*. And how does it appear that these ideas are repugnant to each other? Indeed to say that a

* *Jackson's Defence of human liberty*, p. 55.

thing is *certain* and *uncertain* in the very
 same respect is a *contradiction*; but to say
 that God view'd the creature's sin or fall as
certain, and yet knew that he had a *freedom*
of choice, and *might* have stood but *would*
 not, hath, as far as I can see, nothing that
 looks like an inconsistency in it; nor will
 you venture, I am sure, to say that it is such
 an impossibility as for God to cause the same
 thing *to be* and *not to be* at the same time.
 That man (says learned Dr. *Sherlock*) un-
 derstands very little, who knows not the
 difference between the *necessity* and the
certainty of an event. No event is *neces-*
sary, but that which has a *necessary cause*,
 as the rising and setting of the sun; but
 every event is *certain*, which will *certainly*
 be, though it be by a cause which acts
freely. — Now if that which is done
 freely, may be *certain*; and that which is
certain, may be *certainly* known; then the
certainty of God's fore-knowledge only
 proves the *certainty*, but not the *necessity*
 of the event *.

After all, it must be allow'd that the *etern-*
al and *certain* Prescience of *contingent events*
 is not to be easily accounted for; nor is this
 strange, considering how little we are ac-
 quainted with the powers and extent of an
 infinite mind. For "unless we had infinite

* Discourse of Divine Providence, p. 178.

" under-

“ understandings, it were vanity (to use
 “ the words of a great Divine) to pretend
 “ to explain all the ways of infinite know-
 „ ledge. * ” But because we cannot distinct-
 ly conceive how God foresees *contingencies*
 immediately to pronounce it impossible for
 him to do it, would be presumption with a
 witness. And indeed were you to proceed
 after that manner in all other cases, the doc-
 trine of the *Trinity* itself, the *resurrection* of
 the body, and other points of the greatest
 moment must be struck out of the list of your
credenda, and the articles of your faith would
 soon be brought into a very narrow com-
 pass †.

I must now beg leave to say again, that
 you have not fixt any *plain contradiction* up-
 on the received notion of Divine *Prescience*.
 And did I not know you so well, as to be
 fully convinced of your sincerity in enqui-
 ring after truth, I should be tempted to think
 that the great stir which you make about
fixed and unfixed, free and not free, certain

* Arch-bishop Tillotson's works, vol. II. p. 536.

† Itaque cum rem tantam scrutanti, undique se tenebræ ef-
 fundant & occurrant trices & pedicæ, ex quibus nos non satis
 extricare valeamus, nihil magis tutum & ingenuum puto, quam
ignorantiam nostram. hic aperte profiteri & serio illud *David*
 usurpare, *mirabilis facta est scientia tua præ me & sublimior*
quam ut assequi possim. — Nec mirum videri debet, si
 mens nostra, tam angustis limitibus definita, percipere non possit,
 qua ratione intellectus divinus, cui plane nulli sunt fines, ea cog-
 noscat & attingat quæ sunt a cognitione nostra remotissima.
 Theses Theolog. Gr. Authore Lud. Le Blanc. p. 450.

and uncertain, determined and undetermined; a certain contingency and a contingent certainty, and many other things of the same kind, which you repeat so frequently, was only designed to raise a dust for the sake of blinding the eyes of your readers. But the distinction taken notice of before is, I think, sufficient to obviate all this. And so I must still be of opinion that an event in the nature of it *contingent*, may “ be objected (as “ a good author expresses it) in so full and “ clear a light to the divine intellect, as may “ render it *certainly foreknown* to God, that “ all circumstances considered, it *will* be *.”

Indeed if God's eternal Prescience could not but be the *cause* of events foreknown, and we were sure of this, then such a Prescience and the *liberty* of the creature would be plainly incompatible. But a thing doth not because it was known come to pass, but because it was to come to pass therefore it was foreknown †. “ And bare know- “ ledge is no more the cause of any event, “ which because it is known must infallibly “ be, than my seeing a man run is the cause

* Dr. Fiddes's Theolog. Speculativæ. p. 449.

† Οὐκ ἔστι ἡ πρόγνωσις αἰτίας τοῦ μέλλοντος ἵστανθαι ἀλλὰ τὸ μέλλον ἵστανθαι αἰτίας τῆς προνοίας. Respons. Quest. 58. ad Orthodox. in Justin. Martyr.

Οὐ τοῦτο ἡ πρόγνωσις αὐτοῦ τὰ συνέβηκα ἀγν., ἡτοιμασθαι οὐδὲ ἱκανὴ προῖπει διὰ τοῦτο γίνεσθαι· ἀλλ' ἱκανὴ πάντως ἐμελλέν ἵστανθαι διὰ τοῦτο προῖπει. Chrysost. Hom. 60. in c. xviii. Mat.

" of his running, which, because I do see,
 " is infallibly so **."

Nor does foreknowledge lay a greater necessity upon that which is foreknown, than knowledge does upon that which is known. A sort of necessity indeed must be allowed in both cases; but it is no more than *hypothetical*, which is altogether consistent with the *contingency* of an event, and with the creature's *liberty* *. And when we look upon the thing in this light, we can as well reconcile the *prescience* of sin, with God's *moral perfections*, as with the *freedom* of the Agent. And you your self own, that how *necessary* soever it was that sin *should* be, if God *foreknew* it, that the *foreknowledge* does not *make* the necessity †; and if it does not, on what account, I beseech you, is the blessed God to be blamed? And considering that concession of yours, I wonder how you could say, "For God to foreknow, that the creature
 " he is about to make, not only *may*, but *will*

** Tillotson, vol. ii. p. 536.

* Necessè est quidem omnia illa fieri, quæ Deus futura prævidet, supposita semel ista prævisione: quemadmodum necesse est fieri omnia illa, quæ nos ipsi fieri videmus, supposita nostra visione. Sed sicut visio nostra non mutat naturam rerum, nec facit ut in se necessarium sit, quod ex sua natura liberum sive contingens est, quamvis ex hypothese quod aliqd fieri videmus non possit illud non esse; sic prævisio Dei nihil immutat in rebus futuris, nec earum libertatem aut contingentiam tollit: quamvis illud quod futurum a Deo prævideatur, & sic supponitur futurum non possit non esse futurum. Le Blanc. p. 447.

† Essay, p. 69.

" sin,

“ sin, is to *design* to make it such a creature
 “ as not only *may*, but *shall* sin †.” What!
 if he design’d to make a creature *free*, and
 foreknew that he would abuse that freedom,
 does it follow that he *intended* he *should* do
 it? By no means. Nor was there any founda-
 tion for your concluding, that it was the
will of God that the creature *should* sin, or
 that it was *out of his power* to prevent it *,
 For all that can be fairly argued from it is,
 that it was the will of God, though he fore-
 knew that his creature *would* sin, to leave
 him to his *liberty*; and that notwithstanding
 it was in his power to have prevented his fall,
 if he had pleased, yet he would not interpose,
 by laying him under a *necessity* of continuing
 innocent, but suffer him to make and pursue
 his own choice, after he had laid before him
 the dreadful consequences of disobedience,
 and the glorious reward and happy fruits of
 a constant and an unblemish’d purity. And
 how is the divine conduct culpable in this? It
 would have been an unaccountable way of
 governing a *free* agent, to take away his *li-*
*ber*ty, and to destroy his very nature.

You take notice of a *treatise*, which the
 learned and pious Mr. *Howe* has wrote upon
 this argument, and mention his way of stating
 it: and as you thought fit to do so, one would
 have expected that you should have made it

your business to shew the *inconsistency*, or insufficiency of what that great man has advanced; but instead of that, you pass it over (as others have observed as well as myself) in a very superficial manner; and the most that you say of it is, "Whether he has
 " cleared the doctrine of its just objections,
 " remains a doubt. And it will (I fear) be
 " an *inextricable difficulty*, how any thing can
 " be eternally foreknown that it *will* be,
 " though it was never decreed that it *shall*
 " *be*; or how the foreknowledge itself can
 " be *most certain*, when the thing fore-
 " known, and upon which this foreknow-
 " ledge is grounded, is *uncertain*, what may
 " never be *." Thus you seem to content
 your self with suggesting, that the *manner*
 of reconciling *foreknowledge* with *liberty*, is
 not easily conceived, (which all grant) where-
 as you should have proposed nothing less than
 shewing the *contradiction*, which you know
 we call for, and which alone can convince
 the world that the argument ought to be
 given in your favour. To what purpose is it
 for you to say as you do, "It is to me an im-
 " possibility in the nature of things, for
 " God to know from eternity, that man
 " *would* determine wrong any other way,
 " than by determining for man that he *should*
 " determine wrong, which is to destroy man's

* Essay, p. 81.

"liberty, and to make sin God's own act†; unless you can make it out that *prescience* and *liberty* imply a *contradiction*, which I absolutely deny. "And if you will make trial and attempt to prove it doth, it must be (as Dr. *Hammond* told Dr. *Sanderson* in one of his learned letters to him upon this subject) by proceeding upon the known definition of contradictories, a repugnance *in terminis*, as *idem eodem respectu esse & non esse*, and then you will soon discern the unquestionable truth of my denial *."

Upon the whole, *foreknowledge* and *freedom* may be both maintained; and I cannot see why we must give up either of them†; nor should we do it, if we had a due regard to scripture, and our own experience, and modesty enough to allow that there are many things true, which we are not able to account for.

For my part, I can as easily admit God's foreknowing from eternity how a free crea-

† Essay, p. 91.

* Dr. *Hammond's* works, Vol. 1. p. 691.

† Non ergo propterea nihil est in nostra voluntate, quia Deus præcivit quid futurum esset in nostra voluntate. Non enim qui hoc præcivit, nihil præcivit. Porro si ille qui præcivit, quid futurum esset in nostra voluntate, non utique nihil sed aliquid præcivit, profecto ex illo præciente, est aliquid in nostra voluntate. Quocirca nullo modo cogimur, aut retenti præscientia Dei, tollere voluntatis arbitrium, aut retento voluntatis arbitrio, Deum (quod nefas est) negare præscium futurorum; sed utrumque amplectimur, utrumque fideliter & veraciter confitemur. Illud, ut bene credamus, hoc, ut bene vivamus. *Augustin. de Civit. Dei*, lib. 5. c. 45. †

ture, who then existed only in the divine decree, would use his freedom, when he had actual existence given him, as I can his foreknowing how such a free creature will act in particular cases, any time before he acts. It may be known, as you say, that *a corrupt tree will bring forth corrupt fruit*; but as to the particular and determinate evils which free agents will be guilty of, how, according to your notion, can these be foreknown, when such agents are not under a necessity of doing this or that, but it altogether depends upon their liberty, whether they will do it or not? And indeed it may be well questioned, upon your hypothesis, whether God has any foreknowledge at all of the thoughts, determinations and actions of free creatures. And how small an acquaintance must he have with the moral world, if we suppose that to be the case? I know you say, it is a mistake to think that your notion implies this *. But I fear you will have a harder task to evade the difficulty than you may imagine. You make no doubt, you tell us, but God from the thoughts that are, understands the thoughts that are not, viz. *such future thoughts which depend as certain effects upon our present thoughts as certain causes* †. But how is this? we both of us, you know, consider men as free agents; and

you will allow, I suppose, that whatever their thoughts or purposes may be now, they may see reason for thinking and resolving otherwise before to-morrow; and how can present thoughts, and thoughts that are free too, be *certain causes*? Suppose a man should meditate revenge against his neighbour that had affronted or injured him; would you say, that the thoughts which he entertains, will certainly end in his doing the mischief he intended? If so, would it not follow, that he *must* put his design in execution, and that having determined to do so vile an action, as soon as he had a proper opportunity, he *must* do it, and though a free creature, he would no longer be at liberty to change his mind, and to do otherwise? Would not God's foreknowing one year, or one week or day, what a free agent will do the next, oblige you to conclude, that he must then act *necessarily*, the divine knowledge being certain and infallible? And would not he then view the creature as *free* and *not free*, and his actions as *certain*, and yet *contingent*, the very contradiction which you think you have fixed upon the persons against whom you are disputing? I am willing to suspect my judgment in this way of arguing; but as I cannot as yet see my mistake, I must be of opinion, that you will find a difficulty in accounting for God's foreknowing how his creatures will act any time before their acting, perhaps

haps equal to that which is in our way, when we attempt to account for his foreknowledge before all worlds.

What you mean by the following passage, I can by no means understand, "God's foreknowledge is but a *part* of his knowledge, and is like its object, really *finite* *." May I not as well say, that his *creative power* is but a *part* of his power, and is like its object *finite*, and the same of his *wisdom*, by which he governs the world, and all the creatures in it? And thus, according to you, as a *finite* knowledge is sufficient to foresee future events, so a *finite* power is sufficient to create such a world as this is, and a *finite wisdom* to order all the affairs of it; a sort of divinity which, I am sure, I shall never have a good opinion of.

Nor can I like your citation from Archbishop *King's* sermon, though, as far as I can find, it has your approbation. You tell us, "That if the foreknowledge of contingent events is at any time attributed to God, the meaning may be no more than this, (and then you mention the words of that great Prelate †) that God can be no more surpris'd with any thing that happens, than a wise man that foresees an event can be surprized when it comes to pass, nor can he be any more at a loss what he is to do in such a case, than a wise

* Essay, p. 89. † P. 73.

"man

" man can who is perfectly acquainted with
 " all accidents which may obstruct his de-
 " sign, and has provided against them".
 This, methinks, is but a low way of talk-
 ing concerning one whose understanding is
 infinite. But it is very much like the rest of
 the discourse, the design of which is to shew,
 that even the *moral attributes* of God are of
 a different nature from those we observe in
 men; a notion upon which an eminent di-
 vine of the church of *England* has thought
 fit, though with all deference to the archi-
 episcopal character, to bestow some animad-
 versions, " to prevent (as he tells us *) such
 " ill effects as a great name, recommended
 " with much erudition, may have towards
 " misleading us in our reasonings upon the
 " moral perfections of God.

You must excuse me, Sir, from waiting
 upon you through every branch of your ar-
 gument. Had you brought your reasoning
 into a less number of pages (which I con-
 ceiv'd might have been done without any disad-
 vantage to your cause, and to the much great-
 er satisfaction of the most judicious part of
 your readers) all your paragraphs might have
 been consider'd in their order. But as you have
 thought it most proper to say the same things
 so often over again, only with some variation
 in language, it would have made a book much

* Dr. *Stillingfleet*, Theolog. Speculat. p. 126.

larger than your own, to have moved just as you have done; and for that reason I would not pretend to it. You expect, I know, that if any should think proper to animadvert upon your Essay, they should conform themselves to the rules laid down in the preface to your *three letters*, concerning *the greatness of the divine love*. And one of the rules which I find there is, that they should not satisfy themselves to carp and object here and there. This, I fear, you will say I have not had a due regard to. But I flatter my self, that though I do not answer your expectation in every respect, I have offered some things which affect the whole of your argument about the foreknowledge of God, to which I confined my self. If so, you will have no reason to take it amiss, that I have not in every thing conformed to your directions. Should it appear that I have not taken you right in any of the passages, which have been the occasion of these animadversions, I assure you this is owing to a fault in my *understanding*, and not in my *will*; and I am persuaded you will place any mistakes which you may discover, to my account in that manner.

What valuable purposes your *Essay* is calculated to serve, time will shew; but if your expectations from it are very great, I am apt to think you will be disappointed. I cannot be of your mind, "that the bulk of the Christian world do insensibly slide into an opinion

nion of God's decree of sin, of man's necessity of sinning, resolving every thing into a tyrannical sovereignty; nor do I think that there is any need of our treading over our ground again (as you express it) upon that account. *Antinomianism*, if I must judge according to my little acquaintance with men and things, is very far from being the prevailing system at present. And if it had as many advocates as formerly, we could make as successful a stand against it, and plead for *Prescience* at the same time, as you can upon your principles. So that the advantages which you propose by your publication on these accounts seem to be but imaginary; whereas the disservice it will do to religion, will, I fear, be found to be real, and much greater than you are sensible of. According to your notion the Divine Understanding is *limited* and *confined*, and God is deny'd that knowledge, which is certainly a perfection; such a knowledge, I mean, as excludes the *possibility of encrease*, and by which he is acquainted with all things at once*. The credit of the *prophetical* part of Scripture, as was observed before, is struck at, the foundation of our *trust* and *confidence* in God is, in a great measure, undermined; some of the most remarkable

* Cum enim Deus presentia cognoscat si antequam essent, illa ignorabat, aliquid didicit ipso rerum eventus, & factus est ex non sciente sciens. Theol. Theolog. Le Blanc, p. 445.

turns in human affairs, which the observers of God's works meditate upon with wonder and pleasure, become less considerable; a wise and regular oeconomy in the government of the world cannot be vindicated, and (as Dr. *Fiddes* observes †) "one of the greatest beauties of Providence, which consists in bringing good out of evil, and order out of confusion by an over-ruling power, will cease to be the object of our admiration."

Thus when we read the history of *Joseph*, for instance, and look upon those remarkable occurrences of his life, to which his advancement in the land of *Egypt*, and thereby the preservation of his family and of the church was owing (such as his brethren's offence at his dreams, and at his being his father's particular favourite, their intention to murder him, their selling him to the *Ismaelites*, the vile design of his master's wife against him, because he would not consent to her unchaste inclinations, &c.) as all foreseen by God; we are struck with that wisdom and goodness, which appeared in over-ruling so much wickedness in such a manner as to make it subservient to the most excellent purposes; but if God's *prescience* of these *contingencies* be deny'd, all the beauty of the memorable story is lost, and the whole of it is what some call mere *chance*; whereas we are

† Theolog. Speculat. p. 106.

told that, though *Joseph's* brethren thought evil against him, God, who must therefore foreknow their intentions, meant it for good; Gen. xl. 20. So if we read *Daniel's* prophecies, and the *Revelation* of *St. John*, it will be found that there is (as a learned man cited before well expresses it) "a long series and chain of events, which reach from age to age with infinite turnings, and variety of wisdom, directed by a steady and unerring counsel to some unknown but glorious conclusion * : " And we adore the perfections of that Being who superintends all the affairs of our world, whose counsel shall stand, and who is king for ever and ever. But if we suppose the fore-knowledge of God not to extend to the determinations of free agents, we exclude him from having the absolute and perfect government of the intellectual world, and deny him those honours which are undoubtedly his due. And as often as I think of these things, and consider the languishing state of *practical Religion* among us, and that owing, in a great measure, to our *disputes* and *contentions*, I cannot but be sorry that you should open a fresh scene of debate, and especially about a subject which so few are capable of understanding, and at a time when there is so prevailing an inclination to infidelity, and when your ex-

* *Sherlock of Providence*, p. 115.

cellent abilities might have been much better
employ'd in defending our common Christi-
anity. But I must break off here, and yet
not without adding, that though, as you ob-
serve, a friendship under opposite sentiments
be a paradox to most, as far as I know my
self, it is not so to me; for though I think
in a different manner from you about the
argument of this Letter, as I honour you for
your piety and learned accomplishments, so
I am,

and writing counsel to some unlearned
but glorious conclusion. * And we adore
the petitions of that Being who inspir-
tends all the affairs of our world,
16, 17th.

SIR,

Your most sincere friend

and humble servant,

JOHN NORMAN.

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